



**A GUERRA E
AS GUERRAS
COLONIAIS
NA ÁFRICA
SUBSAARIANA**

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BOSBEFOK and Koevoet
**THE Border War in Namibia and Angola
in South African Soldiers' Memory**

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Resumo: «Bosbefok» e «Koevoet» são duas palavras amplamente conhecidas nas províncias da África do Sul onde a maioria da população fala *Afrikaans*. Durante os 23 anos de conflito, mais de 300 000 jovens serviram na *South African Defence Force*. Estes foram recrutados nas escolas e nas universidades para uma guerra sobre a qual nada sabiam. Recentemente, alguns desses ex-soldados passaram a escrito as suas experiências e as suas memórias. Esses diários oferecem um relato em primeira mão para analisar como os jovens soldados experimentaram um conflito que hoje é recordado como uma das *Hot Wars* da era da Guerra Fria. Os quatro livros que constituem a base para esta pesquisa foram publicados por sul-africanos, em inglês, entre 1998 e 2011. A minha investigação permitiu identificar paralelismos entre os relatos individuais, que podem ser interpretados como novos aspetos de uma memória coletiva. Embora o serviço militar não fosse popular, fazia parte da vida de um sul-africano branco, que só poderia escapar se

deixasse o país. Durante a instrução básica, os chamados «Troepies» tomaram consciência do conflito entre os ingleses e os sul-africanos que falavam *Afrikaans* e, quando foram enviados para as zonas de combate, anotaram a eficiência da máquina de propaganda sul-africana que mantinha a guerra distante do grande público. O serviço efetivo nas distantes áreas operacionais era marcado pelo tédio, pelo consumo de drogas legais e ilegais e pela censura do exército, o que transformava os raros telefonemas e cartas recebidos em «elos vitais» com a antiga vida civil. Alguns soldados começaram a revelar sintomas que hoje são identificados como «Perturbação Pós-Stress Traumático» (PPST). Na gíria sul-africana estes tornaram-se conhecidos como «Bosbefok» ou, literalmente, «loucos do mato». A maioria dos «Troepies» afirmam não ter opinião política sobre as razões da guerra. Afiançam que lutaram apenas porque foram forçados a fazê-lo. Questões sobre sentimentos de culpa permanecem sem resposta, enquanto os maus-tratos e as execuções de civis e de prisioneiros são descritos como fazendo parte da rotina diária na frente de combate. Os crimes de guerra e a tortura não são, no entanto, atribuídos à «Common Tropic», mas às unidades especiais das forças sul-africanas, com destaque para unidade de polícia especial «Koevoet».

Palavras-chave: Guerra, Namíbia, Angola, *Apartheid*

Abstract: «Bosbefok» and «Koevoet» are two words that are widely known among the Afrikaans-speaking population of South Africa. During the 23 years of conflict more than 300 000 young men served as conscripts in the South African Defence Force. They were drafted right away from schools and universities into a war they did not know anything about. Recently some of those former soldiers have published their experiences

and memories in a written form. These diaries and memoirs offer a first-hand account to analyse how young drafted soldiers experienced the conflict that is today remembered as one of the «hot wars» of the Cold War Era. The four books that form the basis for this research were published between 1998 and 2011 by mostly English speaking South Africans. My research identified parallels between individual accounts that can be interpreted as new aspects of a collective memory. Although the military duty was not popular, it was part of the life of a white South African, which could only be escaped by leaving the country. During basic training the so called «Troepies» became aware of the conflict between English and Afrikaans-speaking South Africans and when they were sent to the combat zone they noticed the efficiency of the South African propaganda machine that kept the war out of the South African public. The service in the far away operational area was shaped by boredom, consume of legal and illegal drugs and the strict censorship of the army that turned the rare phone calls and letters from home into «vital links» to the former civilian life. Some soldiers received long-term mental disruptions that are today identified as Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). In South African slang they became known as «bosbefok», or literally «bush crazy». Most of the former Troepies claim they had no political opinion towards the reasons of the war. They were just fighting it because they were forced to do. Questions of guilt stay unanswered while mistreatment and execution of prisoners and civilians are described as everyday business at the frontline. War crimes and acts of torture are however remembered not as committed by the «common Tropic» but by special units of the South African forces like the notorious special police unit «Koevoet».

Keywords: War, Namibia, Angola, Apartheid

Introduction

«Bosbefok» and «Koevoet» are two words of the Afrikaans language that are commonly known among the Afrikaans speaking population in South Africa today. They have their origin in the military slang of the so called Border War that rampaged in Namibia and large parts of Southern Angola for 23 years. Today these two words represent a common memory of a war that had a formative impact on a whole generation of white South African males while the South African society was not aware of what was happening in the war zone.

During the Apartheid era the South African society experienced a process of militarization. It was an obligatory part of the life of every young white South African male to be called up for the army and to serve as a soldier in the South African Defence Force (SADF). At least 300 000 drafted white conscripts were sent to fight in Northern Namibia and Angola. The military service and the war in Namibia and Angola formed a common experience to a whole generation of white males in Apartheid South Africa. This means there must be common patterns of memory.

In recent times a number of former South African soldiers have decided to write down their memories and publish diaries of the time when they had to fight in Namibia and Angola. For the first time these memories offer a first hand account to examine how young drafted soldiers experienced the conflict. This research is based on four books that are analysed to find common patterns of memory and shed light on the dimension of personal experience of the Border War.

The first book was written by Anthony Feinstein and published in 1998. *In Conflict* is the diary-based memory of a young medical officer who was drafted into the South African Army after completing

his academic studies. Today Anthony Feinstein is a professor of psychology at the University of Toronto in Canada¹.

The second book used is *Border-line Insanity* by Tim Ramsden published in 2009. Ramsden had to join the Army as an 18 year old directly after finishing school in 1984 and served as a soldier in Namibia and Angola, at South Africa's Eastern Border to Mozambique and in South Africa's Townships².

Zulu Zulu Golf, written by Arn Durand and published in 2011, describes how the author served as a recruit for the South African Police and volunteered for service in Northern Namibia during the early 1980s joining the notorious Koevoet police unit³.

The fourth book is slightly different to the first three. The author Cameron Blake interviewed more than 40 veterans of military service and the Border War. His results were published in 2009 as *Troepie – From Call-up to Camps*, referring to an Afrikaans slang expression for the common drafted young recruits who were called «Troepies». Blake presents anonymous quotations from his interviews that offer a wide range of experiences and opinions⁴.

While the history of the Border War and the Namibian liberation movement SWAPO have already been topics of research, there has been no focus on personal memory accounts so far. Critics might argue that research of subjective memory only gives information about a certain moment and situation and that therefore accounts of contemporary witnesses are of no representative value. This should

¹ FEINSTEIN, Anthony – *In Conflict*. Windhoek: New Namibia Books, 1998, 156 p. and see <http://www.psychiatry.utoronto.ca/people/dr-anthony-feinstein/> (accessed 24.07.2014).

² RAMSDEN, Tim – *Border-Line Insanity – A National Serviceman's Story*. Alberton: Galago Publishing Company, 2009, 452 p.

³ DURAND, Arn – *Zulu Zulu Golf – Life and Death with Koevoet*. Kapstadt: Struik, 2011, 320 p.

⁴ BLAKE, Cameron – *Troepie – From Call-Up to Camps*. Kapstadt: Struik, 2009, 336 p.

be opposed by the aspect that every source used by historical science is a product of a certain person and a current situation and therefore subjective⁵. Moreover this research focuses on the questions of personal memory and experience what makes the sources extremely valuable. Due to the limited sources the results are not of quantitative but exemplary value.

At first an overview over the Border War, the National Service and the SADF will be presented followed by an analysis of how the war is remembered and which common memory patterns emerge. Finally a conclusion sums up the results.

In linguistic matters working with South African history is always tricky because of terms and definitions that were a basic part of the racist ideology of the Apartheid system. Therefore in the following terms like «black», «white» or «coloured» are not used with political implications but to identify the several different groups of the South African population. The not-English speaking white population with Dutch origin is often known as «Boers». Here the expression Afrikaner or Afrikaans-speaking will be used because of the language that plays an important part in defining their identity.

The Border War and the South African Defence Force.

The Border War in Namibia and Angola

The conflict that most South Africans know today as «Border War» or «Angolan Bush War» started in the mid-1960s as an insurgency and locally limited war of independence which developed into a full scale

⁵ PLATO, Alexander von – «Zeitzeugen und die historische Zunft: Erinnerung, kommunikative Tradierung und kollektives Gedächtnis in der qualitativen Geschichtswissenschaft; Ein Problemaufriss». *BIOS. Zeitschrift für Biographieforschung und Oral History*. Leverkusen. ISSN 0933-5315. Vol. 13, no. 1, 2000, p. 5-29.

conventional war embedded in the Cold War conflict by the end of the 1980s.

During the 19th century the territory of what is Namibia today experienced a growing influence of the Cape region until it was made a German colony named «German South West Africa» in 1884. In 1915 at the early stages of the First World War, a South African army invaded Namibia and defeated the German troops. After the end of the war the newly founded League of Nations authorized South Africa to administer and develop the former German colony of South West Africa until it would be able for independence⁶. South Africa tried to maximize its influence on Namibia and in fact treated the territory like a fifth province. After the Second World War the United Nations succeeded the League of Nations and during the 1950s South Africa faced harsh international criticism for its reign over Namibia⁷.

In 1960 the SWAPO (South West African People's Organization) was established and called for non-violent resistance like the ANC (African National Congress) in South Africa. The aims were clear: the end of the South African influence and a free and democratic government for an independent Namibian nation state⁸. In 1962 the armed branch of the SWAPO – PLAN (People's Liberation Army of Namibia) – was founded and recruits were trained by friendly governments and liberation movements in Africa and Asia. In 1966 the United Nations Resolution 2145 formally withdrew South Africa's mandate for Namibia⁹.

⁶ WALLACE, Marion – *A History of Namibia – From the Beginning to 1990*. London: Hurst C. & Co Publishers Ltd., 2011, p. 205-206.

⁷ STEENKAMP, Willem – *South Africa's Border War 1966–1990*. Gibraltar: Ashanti, 1989, p. 12.

⁸ WALLACE, Marion – *History of Namibia...*, p. 268.

⁹ DOBELL, Lauren – *SWAPO's Struggle for Namibia 1960–1991 – War by other means*. Basel: P. Schlettwein Publishing, 2000, p. 35-36.

At the same time SWAPO tried to start a guerrilla war with cross-border operations from its bases in western Zambia, which caused the South African government to shift the command of all security forces in the Namibian territory to the SADF and send in more regular troops. Meanwhile the United Nations acknowledged SWAPO as the only legitimate representative of the Namibian people¹⁰.

After 13 years of colonial war the Portuguese Carnation Revolution and Portugal's rushed withdrawal from its African colonies led to the independence of Angola and sparked a civil war between the different liberation movements. To prevent the Marxist MPLA (Movimento Popular de Libertação de Angola) from taking over power the SADF allied with rival FNLA (Frente Nacional da Libertação de Angola) and UNITA (União Nacional para a Independência Total de Angola) and started a covert operation in late 1975, that led South African troops deep into Angolan territory. Pretoria was afraid that a MPLA-led Angola would increase Soviet and Communist influence in the region and create a safe haven for SWAPO insurgents. To push back Soviet influence in Africa the USA secretly supported the South African campaign and the CIA liaised with FNLA and UNITA¹¹.

Since 1965 the MPLA had grown close ties with the revolutionary Cuban government that tried to support Marxist revolutionary movements in South America and Africa. In November 1975 Fidel Castro sent troops to Angola to support the embattled MPLA. With Cuban support the MPLA defeated the FNLA and forced the South Africans to retreat in March 1976 while UNITA was pushed back to southern

¹⁰ STAPLETON, Timothy J. – *A Military History of South Africa*. Santa Barbara: Praeger, 2010, p. 169.

¹¹ SAUNDERS, Chris – «Die Überwindung der Krise in Angola und Namibia 1988». In GREINER, Bernd et alii. (Ed.) – *Krisen im Kalten Krieg*. Vol. 2. Hamburg: Hamburger Edition, 2008, p. 525.

Angola where it started a guerrilla war against the MPLA government, being heavily dependent on South African support and arms¹².

SWAPO could now relocate its bases and training facilities into the MPLA – controlled Angolan border area close to Namibia. With support from the MPLA SWAPO – fighters extended their operations deep into Namibian territory. The SADF reacted with the build-up of a counterinsurgency program and frequent operations inside Angola¹³.

In the 1980s the war intensified. Due to increased support from the superpowers the conflict became a hotspot of the Cold War while the level of fighting changed more and more towards conventional warfare. In late 1987 Cuban forces concentrated at the border between Namibia and Angola to put pressure on the South Africans. As a reaction the SADF increased the number of troops as well. As limited fighting broke out in 1988, a serious escalation of the conflict seemed inevitable but both sides feared the consequences of high casualties for domestic politics¹⁴.

Earlier the UN-security council had led separated negotiations with South Africa and SWAPO which in September 1978 resulted in UN Security Council's Resolution 435 that proposed a South African withdrawal from Namibia, which South Africa then refused to implement. But ten years later the South African opinion about the engagement in Namibia had changed. An independent Namibia was not seen as a danger anymore but as dependent to the South African economy and therefore capable of political influence. Furthermore an escalation of violence would have finally ruined the struggling economy and the South African society was not ready to bear high casualties among

¹² Idem – Ibidem, p. 526.

¹³ GOSSMANN, Anita M. – «The South African Military and Counterinsurgency: An Overview». In BAKER Deane-Peter et alii. (Ed.) – *South Africa and Contemporary Counterinsurgency – Roots, Practices, Prospects*. Claremont: UCT Press, 2010, p. 84 and ESTERHUYNS, Abel and JORDAAN, Evert – «The South African Defence Force and Counterinsurgency 1966–1990». In Ibidem, p. 110.

¹⁴ SAUNDERS, Chris – «Die Überwindung der Krise...», p. 533-536.

the white conscripts in a war fought abroad¹⁵. With US-intermediation, Angola, Cuba and South Africa met for negotiations that resulted in a peace agreement signed in New York in 1988. Cuban and South African troops were withdrawn from Angola, in March 1990 Namibia became formally independent and SWAPO won the first free and democratic votes. The conflict in Angola and the role of the UNITA were not part of the negotiations. The Angolan civil war therefore carried on until the death of UNITA's leader Jonas Savimbi in 2002. The independence of Namibia together with changes within the South African society helped to end the reign of the Apartheid system¹⁶.

The SADF and the National Service

As Part of the British Commonwealth the South African Military had fought in both world wars and had kept strong ties to the British Army. The beginning of the Apartheid era after the National Party won the polls in 1948, the exit of the Commonwealth and the foundation of the South African Republic in 1961 put an end to the British tradition of South Africa's armed forces¹⁷. The SADF became an important element of the Apartheid system and was therefore dominated by the Afrikaans-speaking majority among the white population. Afrikaans became a second official language of the military on equal footing with English. British ranks, flags and decorations were substituted by South African counterparts and officer cadets were not sent to Great Britain anymore but to a newly established South African military academy¹⁸.

¹⁵ Idem – Ibidem, p. 537-538.

¹⁶ Idem – Ibidem, p. 538-541 and WALLACE, Marion – *History of Namibia...*, p. 305-307.

¹⁷ STAPLETON, Timothy J. – *A Military History of South Africa...*, p. 113-151.

¹⁸ Idem – Ibidem, p. 152-155.

International criticism on the Apartheid system led to an arms embargo in 1977 which caused South Africa to build up a domestic arms industry. At first improving foreign licence products the state-owned company Armscor (Armaments Development and Production Cooperation) developed several domestic infantry and artillery weapon systems as well as armoured vehicles. Based on experiences from the Border War South Africa is still one of the leading producers of mine protected vehicles today. In the 1980s South Africa even had a secret nuclear weapons program in cooperation with Israel¹⁹.

In the 1950s two thirds of the able young men were allotted for a service of three months. By 1968 the manpower demand of the SADF had grown. A National Service was introduced which was obligatory for every white male. After twelve months of training and duties the draftees returned to civil life and became part of the Citizen Force (CF) that made up the biggest part of the military personnel. Over a time period of several years they would be called up again to serve in so called «camp-duties». After finishing the CT every able white male was still part of the reserve until his 55th birthday. In 1977 the National service was extended to two and the Citizen Force to ten years²⁰.

In Apartheid South Africa the non-white population groups had no duty to serve, but they could volunteer for service in special «black» or «coloured» units that were necessary to meet the huge manpower demand of the South African military. Nonetheless nearly all officers were white and, following the rules of Apartheid, there were separated sleeping and eating facilities for «blacks» and «whites»²¹.

Moreover the SADF employed a number of non-South Africans. Many white Rhodesians who fled down south after the end of the

¹⁹ Idem – Ibidem, p. 158.

²⁰ BLAKE, Cameron – *Troepie – From Call-Up...*, p. 257-262.

²¹ STAPLETON, Timothy J. – *A Military History of South Africa...*, p. 155-156.

Ian Smith regime in 1980 found a new home in the South African military. The notorious 32 battalion («Os Terríveis» – The Terrible Ones) was composed of Portuguese speaking Angolans and in Namibia, the 101 and 203 battalions were formed of the local Ovambo or San population²².

Instead of joining the SADF conscripts could serve in the South African Police (SAP) or the Prison Service. The service in the SAP lasted four years and recruits received a similar basic training as the military. Afterwards they were trained in counter insurgency tactics and transferred to a police station somewhere in South Africa or to the Border area in Namibia. Most police conscripts continued their career in the police force after completing their National Service²³.

There was resistance against the duty to serve. Some young South Africans fled abroad to avoid military service. Great Britain, Canada, the Netherlands and Australia were popular places to go to. In 1979 the «Committee on South African War Resistance» (COSAWR) was founded in London and opened an office in Amsterdam in 1980. Not obeying the conscription order resulted in persecution by the Military Police because of being «Absent Without Leave» (AWOL), a prison sentence of three years and a second drafting order²⁴.

As the war raged on in the 1970s and 1980s religious groups and students protested against the National Service. The 1983-founded End Conscription Campaign (ECC) tried to support conscientious objectors and became more and more popular in the late 1980s. In

²² STAPLETON, Timothy J. – *A Military History of South Africa...*, p. 157; STEENKAMP, Willem – *South Africa's Border War...*, p. 204 and GOSSMANN, Anita M – «The South African Military...», p. 92-94.

²³ BLAKE, Cameron – *Troepie – From Call-Up...*, p. 11 and p. 263-264 as well as DURAND, Arn – *Zulu Zulu Golf – Life and Death...*, p. 39.

²⁴ BLAKE, Cameron – *Troepie – From Call-Up...*, p. 263 and United Nations Centre against Apartheid/Committee on South African War Resistance – *The issue of conscientious objection in Apartheid South Africa: Growth of the Anti-Conscription Movement*. Vol. 9. New York: United Nations, 1989, p. 2 and p. 6-7.

the 1988 the organization was declared illegal by the government. Resistance against conscription was equal to fighting the Apartheid system and an act of solidarity with the anti-Apartheid movements. Therefore the government tried to battle it with harsh punishments²⁵.

Between 1951 and 1993 around 600 000 drafted white conscripts had to serve in the South African military. At least half of them – 300 000 recruits – spend some time of their service in the Operational Area in Northern Namibia or even in Angola. The numbers show that the Military Service and the war in Namibia and Angola are a common experience to a whole generation of white South African males. With the end of the Apartheid system in 1994 the National Service was stopped and the SADF was substituted by the South African National Defence Force (SANDF) which today is composed of volunteers and open to South African citizen of all population groups²⁶.

The Border War in the memory of South African soldiers.

National Service and the conflict between English and Afrikaans speaking South Africans

«I wasn't looking forward to the army. The whole thing seemed strange»²⁷. In the mid-1980s a survey of the South African government showed that only 20-30% of all drafted conscripts had a positive opinion about the National Service. The majority just accepted their

²⁵ United Nations Centre against Apartheid/Committee on South African War Resistance – *The issue of conscientious objection...*, p. 5 and p. 19-20 as well as «Conscription into the SADF – 25 years of Resistance». *South African Outlook*. Rondebosch. Vol. 116, no. 1366, April 1985, p. 55-56.

²⁶ SIMON, Rita J. et alii. – *A Handbook of Military Conscription and Composition the World Over*. Lanham: Lexington Books, 2010, p. 164-172.

²⁷ An unnamed former serviceman quoted from BLAKE, Cameron – *Troepie – From Call-Up...*, p. 8.

fate and tried to get it over as uncomplicated as possible²⁸. «The army was something I didn't want to do. I was forced into it. [...] I thought, to hell with it. Let's go get it over and done with it»²⁹. The government tried to present the National Service as a positive thing that turned boys into men and helped to transform the youth into responsible adults. Conscription was accepted as an obligatory part of the «white life» in South Africa, although it never was popular³⁰.

For many recruits the National Service was the first time that they realized that there was a difference among the white population of South Africa.

About this whole English-Afrikaans thing. Basics [training] was the first time I became aware of this divide – that there were people who didn't think the same way that you thought, and who grew up differently to you. There were cultural differences between the English-speaking and Afrikaans-speaking guys³¹.

The armed forces as a basic element of the Apartheid system were dominated by Afrikaans-speakers. During the mid-1970s 85% of the army, 75% of the air force and 50% of the navy personnel were Afrikaners³². For English speaking minority this could become a serious problem in the beginning: «Every order came down in Afrikaans, the language of the army, which I couldn't claim fluency. I struggled to

²⁸ CONWAY, Daniel – «Somewhere on the Border-of Credibility: The Cultural Construction and Contestation of «the Border» in white South African Society». In BAINES, Gary et alii. (Ed.) – *Beyond the Border War – New Perspectives on South Africa's Late-Cold War Conflict*. Pretoria: Unisa Press, 2008, p. 80.

²⁹ An unnamed former serviceman quoted from BLAKE, Cameron – *Troepie – From Call-Up...*, p. 3.

³⁰ CONWAY, Daniel – «Somewhere on the Border-of Credibility...», p. 80-81 and RAMSDEN, Tim – *Border-Line Insanity...*, p. 278.

³¹ An unnamed former serviceman quoted from BLAKE, Cameron – *Troepie – From Call-Up...*, p. 49.

³² STAPLETON, Timothy J. – *A Military History of South Africa...*, p. 153.

understand what they meant at times»³³. A former drill sergeant remembers: «We were supposed to drill the rookies [new recruits] for one week in English and one week in Afrikaans. But I'm Afrikaans, like the army, so it was always in Afrikaans»³⁴.

Successfully climbing up the career ladder seemed nearly impossible for English-speakers. Anthony Feinstein remembers an English speaking officer who: «appeared painfully aware of his outsider status and wasted no time in explaining the difficulties this had caused him during the course of his career. Promotion, or rather the lack of it, was a sore point and discrimination darkly hinted at»³⁵.

For the common serviceman the differences vanished with the hardships of the day to day life in the army. The language barrier became more and more porous: «By now we were speaking a sort of Afrikaanglish, or Englikaans, where the key points were made in Afrikaans and a sentence would be completed in English»³⁶. The physical and mental strains of the drill and training equalized all differences. As one unnamed Serviceman resumes:

It was much an English-Afrikaans thing – us and them – very much so. Then we'd [...] go through all the shit together. Trust me, when you got out of the army there was no difference between us. The guys that you detested when you started became your best buddies³⁷.

³³ RAMSDEN, Tim – *Border-Line Insanity...*, p. 22.

³⁴ An unnamed former serviceman quoted from BLAKE, Cameron – *Troepie – From Call-Up...*, p. 51.

³⁵ FEINSTEIN, Anthony – *In Conflict*, p. 43.

³⁶ RAMSDEN, Tim – *Border-Line Insanity...*, p. 70.

³⁷ An unnamed former serviceman quoted from BLAKE, Cameron – *Troepie – From Call-Up...*, p. 48.

The South African Propaganda

Like every war the South African engagement in Namibia needed to be justified at home. Therefore the South African government made excessive use of Cold War rhetoric: «Great pride was taken by our leaders who proclaimed we were defending western values, that South Africa and its mandate South West Africa were one of the last bulwarks on our continent resisting the communist onslaught on democracy»³⁸. Anthony Feinstein remembers the war as being presented as «nothing short of a crusade against communism»³⁹.

The western values and the Christian civilization of the «white» South Africa were regarded as being endangered by a «total onslaught» of the USSR and its allied African liberation movements. Like the «red threat» in 1950s USA the South African government evoked a «rooi gevaar» (red danger) that could only be fought with a «total strategy» legitimating the militarization of the society⁴⁰.

This concept of enemy was reproduced in a number of movies and books, some even published by the SADF itself. The years between 1971 and 1987 were the booming era of South African war movies, all presenting a heroic soldier or National Serviceman who sacrifices himself for South Africa and repels all foreign enemies as a glorious «grensvegter» (border fighter)⁴¹. Anthony Feinstein sums up the opinions of his comrades: «The influence of the dreaded com-

³⁸ FEINSTEIN, Anthony – *In Conflict*, p. 4.

³⁹ Idem – *Ibidem*.

⁴⁰ VALE, Peter – «The Cold War and South Africa: Repetitions and Revisions on a Prolegomenon». In BAINES, Gary et alii. (Ed.) – *Beyond the Border War – New Perspectives on South Africa's Late-Cold War Conflict*. Pretoria: Unisa Press, 2008, p. 25 and POPESCU, Monica – *South African Literature Beyond the Cold War*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010, p. 12.

⁴¹ VALE, Peter – «The Cold War and South Africa...», p. 36 and CRAIG, Dylan – «Total Justice: Ideological Manipulation and South Africa's Border War». In BAINES, Gary et alii. (Ed.) – *Beyond the Border War – New Perspectives on South Africa's Late-Cold War Conflict*. Pretoria: Unisa Press, 2008, p. 60 and p. 65.

munists was apparently everywhere and they were without doubt the reason behind all South Africa's troubles»⁴².

The soldiers fighting in the war were of course the most important audience of the propaganda, but it was designed to affect the whole society and all ages:

We used to have little girls writing to us – six-, ten-, twelve-year-olds – children. They obviously had to write in class. [...] You'd open a letter from this seven-year old girl telling you how wonderful you were, that you were saving them and so on⁴³.

The church also took its share in spreading the «right» opinion. The «Nederduitse Gereformeerde Kerk» (Dutch Reformed Church) as another central element of Afrikaner nationalism had many devotional members among the Afrikaans-speaking soldiers. Some soldiers remember that during services priests preached that the government might make the right decisions to stop the «swart gevaar» (black danger) and the SADF might kill as many enemies as possible⁴⁴.

The government tried to use the Cold War image in every public statement. For example in September 1981, when the secretary of defence Magnus Malan said in parliament: «A disturbing aspect of this operation was, that there were Russians everywhere, even along our borders»⁴⁵. The omnipresent Cold War rhetoric also made its way into the language of the soldiers. Remembering the US war in Vietnam a few years before Troepies were sent not to Namibia but to what

⁴² FEINSTEIN, Anthony – *In Conflict*, p. 105.

⁴³ An unnamed former serviceman quoted from BLAKE, Cameron – *Troepie – From Call-Up...*, p. 172.

⁴⁴ RAMSDEN, Tim – *Border-Line Insanity...*, p. 27 and p. 54 and an unnamed former serviceman quoted from BLAKE, Cameron – *Troepie – From Call-Up...*, p. 172.

⁴⁵ Quoted in JASTER, Robert S. – *South Africa in Namibia – The Botha Strategy*. Lanham/New York/London: University Press of America for the Center of International Affairs, 1985, p. 29.

they called «Nam» and after finishing their service they returned to the «States» of the South African Republic⁴⁶.

Day to Day Life in the War Zone. Censorship and «vital links»

To keep the Government's monopoly on news from the war zone the «Defence Act» prohibited independent reporting from the Operational Area and the press back in South Africa was forced to self-censorship⁴⁷. Furthermore SADF practiced a strict censorship among the troops. Phone calls to South Africa were rare and only possible from a small number of military bases and «the military censors frequently eavesdropped, betraying their presence with coughs, grunts and giggles»⁴⁸. Every letter was read by military censors who made names of places, dates and sensitive events unrecognizable with thick black paint before it was sent home via airmail. Record keeping, diaries and taking photos or even owning a camera was strictly forbidden and every soldier was searched before returning to South Africa. But some like Tim Ramsden managed to keep a diary secretly and smuggle it home in the end⁴⁹.

Experiencing violence, death and the reality of war, the soldiers noticed that «Back in South Africa we had been so effectively chloroformed that even a war had largely been kept from our consciousness»⁵⁰. They were fighting a war the South African public, controlled by censorship and propaganda, was not aware of. Every time he

⁴⁶ VALE, Peter – «The Cold War and South Africa...», p. 35 and RAMSDEN, Tim – *Border-Line Insanity...*, p. 179.

⁴⁷ CRAIG, Dylan – «Total Justice: Ideological Manipulation...», p. 61-63 and «How Free is the Press». *South African Outlook*. Rondebosch. Vol. 116, no. 1366, April 1985, p. 63.

⁴⁸ FEINSTEIN, Anthony – *In Conflict*, p. 95.

⁴⁹ RAMSDEN, Tim – *Border-Line Insanity...*, p. 123 and p. 175-176.

⁵⁰ FEINSTEIN, Anthony – *In Conflict*, p. 65.

received a letter from home Anthony Feinstein noticed that: «This was a further proof of the great South African amnesia that had enveloped us all»⁵¹. The secrecy of the military operations led to strange situations like this: «In fact we were listening to the radio while inside Angola with Pik Botha [South African secretary of foreign affairs from 1977-1994] insisting that no South African troops were inside!»⁵².

For a long time the only news the South African public received about the events in Namibia and Angola were the numbers of killed «terrorists». But in the end of the 1980s the government released more and more news about the war. Tim Ramsden noticed: «It seemed that suddenly the public was being allowed to read about what was happening in the operational area»⁵³.

For the soldiers serving in Namibia and Angola news from home were the only connection to the outside world and «vital links» to family and friends at home and the life they led before becoming soldiers. Letters were read again and again while every packet caused great joy and often helped to improve the boring menu of the army⁵⁴.

The Civil Population

The civil population of the Operational Area consisted mostly of people from the Ovambo ethnic group who settled in Northern Namibia as well as across the border in Southern Angola⁵⁵. The civil population was often caught between the fronts of the conflict. The

⁵¹ Idem – Ibidem, p. 67.

⁵² An unnamed former serviceman quoted from BLAKE, Cameron – *Troepie – From Call-Up...*, p. 187.

⁵³ RAMSDEN, Tim – *Border-Line Insanity...*, p. 252.

⁵⁴ Idem – Ibidem, p. 138, p. 146 and p. 150 as well as FEINSTEIN, Anthony – *In Conflict*, p. 96.

⁵⁵ WALLACE, Marion – *A History of Namibia*, p. 97-98.

guerrilha strategy of SWAPO depended on the help of the local population and often the SWAPO fighters received food and shelter if needed. If the locals did not cooperate SWAPO used force to achieve their aims. Forced conscription, amongst others, seems to have been a common practise⁵⁶. While the South African propaganda justified the presence of SADF-troops with the protection of the civil population they rather caused destruction and death among the civilians. As Arn Durand describes it very clear:

It was always the local population, the civilians, who suffer most during any war or conflict. [...] The Ovambos, especially those in southern Angola, get fucked up by SWAPO and then by us, and then by us again and then by SWAPO again and then by UNITA and then by FAPLA [Forças Armadas Populares de Libertação de Angola – armed wing of the MPLA]⁵⁷.

Because of loyalty towards SWAPO or fear of their revenge most civilians did not cooperate with the SADF, which in turn caused the anger of the South African soldiers: «As far as we believed most of the locals were loyal to SWAPO, so they also became the enemy because they were offering silent support to the terrors [terrorists] who were trying to kill us»⁵⁸.

Experiences of a war in which an attacker might disappear among the civil population spread suspicion and anger against the civilians among the Troepies. «The local population was no longer viewed as

⁵⁶ RAMSDEN, Tim – *Border-Line Insanity...*, p. 139, p. 145, p. 155 and DURAND, Arn – *Zulu Zulu Golf – Life and Death...*, p. 65-66 as well as STAPLETON, Timothy J. – *A Military History of South Africa...*, p. 172.

⁵⁷ DURAND, Arn – *Zulu Zulu Golf – Life and Death...*, p. 9.

⁵⁸ RAMSDEN, Tim – *Border-Line Insanity...*, p. 136.

innocuous for behind the disarming, friendly smile may have been the hand that fired the missile»⁵⁹.

The refusal to cooperate was often described as stoic and caused many National Servicemen to have no feelings of sympathy or even empathy towards civilians. Therefore abuse and violence coined the contact with the civil population. How many civilians died because of mistreatment, violence from SWAPO or South African forces, famine, landmines and unexploded ammunition is impossible to say⁶⁰.

The poverty and simple living of the Ovambos was an odd experience for most white South Africans. The brutal treatment and destructions of war could worsen their conditions within minutes. After surviving a fire fight close to an Ovambo settlement Anthony Feinstein noticed: «Granted it was a barren, desolate area, but they had managed to build their village and support themselves the way most of the Ovambo people did. In the space of twenty-five minutes it had all been wiped away»⁶¹. Innocent victims and the results of their ruthless and violent action caused doubts among some Troepies about the sense of their mission:

Our propaganda told us that we were in Namibia to protect the local population from the dangers of terrorism and a godless society. With a village destroyed, the area smouldering and littered with pieces of human flesh, how was it possible to justify our presence there?⁶²

⁵⁹ FEINSTEIN, Anthony – *In Conflict*, p. 59.

⁶⁰ RAMSDEN, Tim – *Border-Line Insanity...*, p. 136, p. 149-150 and p. 271 and DURAND, Arn – *Zulu Zulu Golf – Life and Death...*, p. 9 and p. 93-94.

⁶¹ RAMSDEN, Tim – *Border-Line Insanity...*, p. 148 and p. 271 and FEINSTEIN, Anthony – *In Conflict*, p. 39 and p. 58.

⁶² FEINSTEIN, Anthony – *In Conflict*, p. 58.

Following British and French experiences in counterinsurgency wars the SADF wanted to win the «hearts and minds» of the local population to weaken SWAPO's popularity. After 1977 a number of development programs were started. National Servicemen and members of the Citizen Force were ordered to work in their civilian profession as doctors or teachers to improve medical care and education⁶³. Army medic Anthony Feinstein experienced that the locals urgently needed medical care but they disliked the military distribution. A common reaction was: «We don't want you, your knowledge or your medicines. We want nothing from the Army»⁶⁴. It seems that the «hearts and minds» – operations of the SADF did not succeed, because until their final withdrawal from Namibia the presence of South African troops was refused by the majority of the Namibian population⁶⁵.

Consume of legal and illegal drug

«Any downtime in the operational area went hand-in-hand with drinking – in our case through boredom. Those who had seen fighting turned to booze as a stress-reliever and medicine; for them it became a tool to keep the tormenting demons at bay»⁶⁶. Alcohol as a legal and accessible drug was widespread among the South African troops. In the remote bases and camps in the African bush it was often the only leisure time activity. Others – having experienced violence and war – used alcohol to cope with their burden. Officials

⁶³ ESTERHUYNS, Abel and JORDAAN, Evert – «The South African Defence...», p. 117 and STEENKAMP, Willem – *South Africa's Border War...*, p. 232.

⁶⁴ FEINSTEIN, Anthony – *In Conflict*, p. 88

⁶⁵ GORDON, Robert J. – «Oh Shucks, Here Comes UNTAG!. Peacekeeping as Adventure in Namibia». In BAINES, Gary et alii. (Ed.) – *Beyond the Border War – New Perspectives on South Africa's Late-Cold War Conflict*. Pretoria: Unisa Press, 2008, p. 233.

⁶⁶ RAMSDEN, Tim – *Border-Line Insanity...*, p. 130.

tried to limit or reduce the drinking among the troops while some commanders tolerated no drop of alcohol among their subordinates⁶⁷.

Although strictly forbidden, Marijuana was also widespread among the troops. Tim Ramsden reports that of the 37 soldiers of his platoon 30 frequently smoked marijuana, developing tricks how to hide their drug consumption from their officers⁶⁸. Missions in the Operational Area made the drug use easier because there rules were not kept that strict. Especially Angola seems to have been an «extra-legal area» where acquisition and use of marijuana was even easier⁶⁹.

Other soldiers tried to get high on whatever they could find. Medic Anthony Feinstein observed that the narcotics of his medical supplies mysteriously disappeared until he noticed that a colleague suffering from depression was the culprit: «Being a doctor, he had easy access to the narcotics cupboard and the drug had helped him through what by his own admission had been the hell of an infantry base»⁷⁰.

For some the drug abuse led to a stay in the detention barracks. Others finished their military career in rehab or the psychiatry of a military hospital⁷¹.

⁶⁷ BLAKE, Cameron – *Troepie – From Call-Up...*, p. 162-163: Interview with an unnamed former serviceman; FEINSTEIN, Anthony – *In Conflict*, p. 44 and p. 210.

⁶⁸ RAMSDEN, Tim – *Border-Line Insanity...*, p. 40, p. 48, p. 70, p. 75, p. 191 and DURAND, Arn – *Zulu Zulu Golf – Life and Death...*, p. 265.

⁶⁹ BLAKE, Cameron – *Troepie – From Call-Up...*, p. 115, p. 157 and p. 247: Interviews with unnamed former servicemen.

⁷⁰ FEINSTEIN, Anthony – *In Conflict*, p. 66 and p. 139.

⁷¹ BLAKE, Cameron – *Troepie – From Call-Up...*, p. 116 and p. 157: Interviews with unnamed former servicemen and FEINSTEIN, Anthony – *In Conflict*, p. 139.

«Bosbefok»: The Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)

Drugs could not protect from the invisible scars of war. Because of the physical and mental pressure and the experience of violence and war several of the homecoming soldiers suffered from Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). In South Africa it became commonly known as «bosbefok» (sometimes spelled «bosbevok»), which can literally be translated as «bush crazy» and has its origin in the military slang⁷².

The death of a good friend or a comrade, steady mental pressure as well as other traumatising experiences of fights and violence could cause symptoms of PTSD. Some Troepies suffered so heavily that they decided to go AWOL: «When I came back I didn't talk about things anymore. I totally withdrew. [...] I refused to go back. I just said, 'No more. That's it'»⁷³.

Traumatising experiences and the physical and mental pressure also caused a fatalistic carelessness among some soldiers. Enforced by the boredom and a feeling of senselessness simple security rules were disobeyed and the own life was risked: «We had developed a fatalistic attitude that whatever happened, happened. We shrugged and treated it like a training exercise»⁷⁴.

During training soldiers were already pushed to their limits to prepare them for combat. Bullying by superiors was also common and raised the tension. The thin red line that marked how much pressure and harassment someone could bear was called «breaking point». Once the breaking point was reached, conflicts between troops

⁷² CONWAY, Daniel – «Somewhere on the Border-of Credibility...», p. 84 and BLAKE, Cameron – *Troepie – From Call-Up...*, p. 295.

⁷³ An unnamed former serviceman quoted from BLAKE, Cameron – *Troepie – From Call-Up...*, p. 248-249.

⁷⁴ RAMSDEN, Tim – *Border-Line Insanity...*, p. 115, p. 135, p. 142 and p. 194; BLAKE, Cameron – *Troepie – From Call-Up...*, p. 248: Interview with an unnamed former serviceman.

and their officers or among the soldiers would escalate, often violent. Some soldiers had to face military courts for attacking superiors or comrades⁷⁵.

The number of soldiers affected of mental disorder and PTSD was so high that the military command could not ignore it. Tim Ramsden remembers about his return from the Operational Area in 1988:

We had to go through seven tents, which they pointed out to us. In each there was a table, a few chairs, and a couple of military counsellors, more appropriately called head doctors [...]. Maybe they thought that everybody coming back from the border was bosbevok – suffering from borderline insanity. Well, maybe they were right⁷⁶.

Having studied psychology before being drafted, Anthony Feinstein noticed that he himself featured some of the evidence of the stress disorder:

Suddenly and unexpectedly I found myself in the unpleasant, although interesting, position of reviewing the case history of my own experience. And for my company I had a base full of prospective clients. I was in the unique position of being able to document PTSD symptomatology in our unit over time⁷⁷.

⁷⁵ BLAKE, Cameron – *Troepie – From Call-Up...*, p. 50, p. 60 and p. 63: Interviews with unnamed former servicemen; DURAND, Arn – *Zulu Zulu Golf – Life and Death...*, p. 44-45 and RAMSDEN, Tim – *Border-Line Insanity...*, p. 20, p. 93-94, p. 158-159 and p. 170-171.

⁷⁶ RAMSDEN, Tim – *Border-Line Insanity...*, p. 277.

⁷⁷ FEINSTEIN, Anthony – *In Conflict*, p. 90.

War Crimes and Acts of Torture

As it has been shown, war crimes against the civil population were committed by both SWAPO and the South African troops. The sights of murder and innocent victims created situations that even the hardened Troepies were not prepared for. Discovering murdered civilians during a patrol in Southern Angola Tim Ramsden recognized that: «When I closed my eyes, I could almost hear the screams and feel the tension of what had occurred»⁷⁸. This memory should stay forever: «We knew, however, that we would never be able to cleanse our minds of it. It would haunt us forever»⁷⁹.

Abuse and torture of captured suspects was a common practise among the South African security forces in Namibia and Angola. To gain information about weapons caches or marching routes suspects were beaten and mistreated. Some were put into earth holes without food or water to let them suffer in the harsh Namibian climate that ranges from burning hot during the day to sub-zero temperatures during the night. Others report that captured suspects were bound to the fenders or the front of a military vehicle that would then break through the thick bush to cause multiple injuries and heavy pain for the victim until he revealed his information⁸⁰.

Torture is often blamed on the Special Forces of the army and the «Koevoet» Police Counterinsurgency unit, but mistreatment of captured suspects was also practised by regular army units. The victims of torture and captives that seemed to have no value for the security

⁷⁸ Idem – Ibidem, p. 94.

⁷⁹ Idem – Ibidem, p. 168 and p. 282.

⁸⁰ Idem – Ibidem, p. 103; BLAKE, Cameron – *Troepie – From Call-Up...*, p. 165, p. 168 and p. 181: Interviews with unnamed servicemen and DURAND, Arn – *Zulu Zulu Golf – Life and Death*, p. 1. For testimonies in court about torture by the South African police force in Namibia see: «Torture in Namibia». *South African Outlook*. Rondebosch. Vol. 116, no. 1366, April 1985, p. 57-59.

forces were executed and murdered in the bush⁸¹. The Operational Area again proved to be a lawless, extrajudicial area where platoon leaders or even common soldiers felt authorized to execute a self-condemned death-sentence or at least could be sure that war crimes would not be discovered and brought to court.

«The cutting off of ears, fingers and even scrotums was practised by some members of the armed forces and Koevoet»⁸². As it is also known to be practised by American GIs in Vietnam, some South African soldiers in Namibia and Angola mutilated the bodies of killed enemies too⁸³. Anthony Feinstein remembers that human remains were kept as trophies: «I was told with a good deal of mirth that the clothing and bones had been taken from *guerrillas*, killed in combat»⁸⁴. Not every officer tolerated such misdeed. The execution of captives however seems to have been a common practise among the South African forces⁸⁵.

«Koevoet»: The Counterinsurgency Unit of the South African Police in Namibia

The Special Operations (K) Unit of the South African Police in Namibia became known as «Koevoet». Koevoet is an Afrikaans slang word and literally means «cow foot» but describes the «crow bar» or

⁸¹ BLAKE, Cameron – *Troepie – From Call-Up...*, p. 173, p. 189 and p. 296: Interviews with unnamed servicemen and DURAND, Arn – *Zulu Zulu Golf – Life and Death*, p. 1-3, p. 189 and p. 245.

⁸² BLAKE, Cameron – *Troepie – From Call-Up...*, p. 188.

⁸³ DURAND, Arn – *Zulu Zulu Golf – Life and Death*, p. 188-189 and BLAKE, Cameron – *Troepie – From Call-Up...*, p. 151: Interview with an unnamed serviceman. For US-war crimes in Vietnam compare: GREINER, Bernd – *Krieg ohne Fronten – Die USA in Vietnam*. Bonn: Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung, 2007, p. 183-184 and p. 240-242.

⁸⁴ FEINSTEIN, Anthony – *In Conflict*, p. 32.

⁸⁵ DURAND, Arn – *Zulu Zulu Golf – Life and Death*, p. 188-189.

«pinch bar» tool that is used to violently open doors, windows, etc. Established in 1979 the Koevoet units were at first treated like an open secret until they became a formal branch of the 1982 founded South West African Police (SWAPOL). Recruited mainly from the local population and former SWAPO fighters who had been turned to fight their former comrades they were commanded by white police officers of the SAP or SWAPOL or volunteers from the SADF reserve. In fact they were nothing but bounty hunters in service of the South African Security Forces because they received rewards for every killed «terrorist»⁸⁶. Attracted by the bounty and the notorious reputation, many Koevoet fighters were very young. Anthony Feinstein remembers a Koevoet officer during recruiting: «As long as they were able to pull a trigger that was fine with him»⁸⁷.

Koevoet was between 1000 and 2000 man strong and equipped with the typical Casspir armoured cars of the South African Police. The unit claimed to have the highest «kill-ratio» of all South African troops, meaning they had the highest number of killed enemies compared to own losses⁸⁸. Koevoet soon had a notorious reputation as a merciless fighting unit consisting of adventurers, dare devils and

⁸⁶ STEENKAMP, Willem – *South Africa's Border War*, p. 208; DURAND, Arn – *Zulu Zulu Golf – Life and Death*, p. 77, p. 82-84 and p. 90; BLAKE, Cameron – *Troepie – From Call-Up...*, p. 165; Interview with an unnamed former serviceman and RAMSDEN, Tim – *Border-Line Insanity...*, p. 175.

⁸⁷ FEINSTEIN, Anthony – *In Conflict*, p. 16 and see also DURAND, Arn – *Zulu Zulu Golf – Life and Death*, p. 111.

⁸⁸ RAMSDEN, Tim – *Border-Line Insanity...*, p. 124, p. 132 and p. 142 and DURAND, Arn – *Zulu Zulu Golf – Life and Death*, p. 180, p. 184, p. 189, p. 249 and p. 267-268. Arn Durand figures Koevoet's «kill ratio» at 25:1, what would signify Koevoet as the most efficient combat unit in the history of military conflicts (seep. 82). «Body Count» was also common among the American forces in Vietnam, see GREINER, Bernd, *Krieg ohne Fronten – Die USA in Vietnam*, p. 75-76. In Vietnam for example Special Forces of the US-Army had a «kill ratio» of 22:1 that was seven times higher than the ratio of average units. Here it is also not clear how many killed civilians were counted as enemy casualties (see GREINER, Bernd, *Krieg ohne Fronten – Die USA in Vietnam*, p. 166). RAMSDEN, Tim – *Border-Line Insanity...*, p. 132; «Torture in Namibia», p. 58 and DURAND, Arn – *Zulu Zulu Golf – Life and Death*, p. 9.

tough guys who followed their own rules and had a liability to alcohol and drugs. Tim Ramsden describes them the following: «one thing was for sure: when we saw them aboard their Casspirs, we regarded them with respect and kept a safe distance, believing that what they had seen might have altered their minds»⁸⁹. The monetary rewards caused many Koevoet members to listen to the radio communication of other units to forestall them and fight and kill a group of suspected terrorists first. Killed civilians were often presented as terrorists to gain a higher bounty. As the former Koevoet member Arn Durand remembers: «If a civilian was killed in the crossfire, we could often claim it as a kill, provided there were enough enemy weapons to go around»⁹⁰.

The 'killer-image' of Koevoet was supported by the practise of tying the bodies of killed enemies to spare tyres or the front of their vehicles. This was justified with the limited space inside the armoured cars and the hot Namibian climate that supported a fast decay of the corpses. But this also had a clear and simple message: «Join SWAPO and join your buddy over there»⁹¹.

Questions of Guilt

Even decades after the war most of the veterans rarely speak about their former attitudes towards politics of the conflict and the question of guilt. Most of the former soldiers claim that they had no political

⁸⁹ RAMSDEN, Tim – *Border-Line Insanity...*, p. 123.

⁹⁰ DURAND, Arn – *Zulu Zulu Golf – Life and Death*, p. 9 as well as RAMSDEN, Tim – *Border-Line Insanity...*, p. 132 and «Torture in Namibia», p. 58.

⁹¹ An unnamed former serviceman quoted from BLAKE, Cameron – *Troepie – From Call-Up...*, p. 185, see also RAMSDEN, Tim – *Border-Line Insanity...*, p. 177-178 and DURAND, Arn – *Zulu Zulu Golf – Life and Death*, p. 63, p. 98-99, p. 101, p. 185 and p. 276.

opinion towards the reasons of the war. They say that they were forced to fight it and had no other chance⁹².

Of the analysed accounts only Anthony Feinstein takes a firm stand. He remembers that he became aware of the injustice of the Apartheid System, the wrongs of South Africa's military engagement in Namibia and Angola and the legitimate cause of the Namibian Liberation Movement. But a fight against his commitment in the military system would have had serious consequences for himself and his academic career. He confesses that, to prevent these consequences, he acted selfish and tried to survive the military service without attracting attention or getting involved in any trouble⁹³. But thinking about others who left the country to avoid military service and times that he spent outside South Africa during his studies, he always felt that: «There was the constant feeling that I could have prevented it»⁹⁴.

Other former soldiers also try to implicate that they had a rather negative opinion about the reasons of the war, but they still lack a definite statement or an answer to the question of guilt. Others try to avoid a personal responsibility by referring to the totalitarian apartheid system of which they became a part as a soldier. Tim Ramsden for example remembers meeting a former SWAPO fighter 15 years after the end of the war: «They had fought for what they believed in – or what they had been indoctrinated into believing by their political masters. No different from us when I thought about it»⁹⁵.

Finally Arn Durand justifies his commitment in the war and volunteer service with Koevoet with his youth and longing for adventure: «It was going to be the real deal and I was hoping to see some

⁹² For example RAMSDEN, Tim – *Border-Line Insanity...*, p. 13 and an interview with an unnamed former serviceman in BLAKE, Cameron – *Troepie – From Call-Up...*, p. 150-152.

⁹³ FEINSTEIN, Anthony – *In Conflict*, p. 60-61 and p. 72-74.

⁹⁴ Idem – *Ibidem*, p. 74.

⁹⁵ RAMSDEN, Tim – *Border-Line Insanity...*, p. 281.

action»⁹⁶. It was not propaganda and belief in the Apartheid system that made him volunteer but the hope to experience adrenalin and adventure. He tries to present himself as a young daredevil longing for action and adventure and not aware of politics.

Conclusion

The research has proved that there are several collective memories that can be found in different individual accounts of memory. As it was shown in the beginning, the experience of military service was common for every white male during the Apartheid era or as we can rather say to a whole generation of white South African males. It is remembered in collective memory patterns that even can be found in some words of the Afrikaans language that were shaped by the experience of the border war.

The National Service was not popular and most conscripts became aware of the divide between English and Afrikaans speakers among the white population during their service for the first time. The anti-communist propaganda of the Apartheid system was remembered as well as the strict army censorship and the high value of letters from home. Drug abuse and mistrust and dislike against the civil population were part of the day to day life in the war zone from where many soldiers returned with invisible, mental scars that became known as «bosbefok». The special police unit Koevoet and its notorious reputation is remembered as well as acts of torture and war crimes that seem to have been common among the security forces.

Noticeable is that most personal accounts of memory lack a critical regard of the own past. The question of guilt stays unanswered. Of course we have to recall that the Border War is merely one of

⁹⁶ DURAND, Arn – *Zulu Zulu Golf – Life and Death*, p. 43.

several chapters of a painful history the South African Society has to deal with. It can only be hoped that the open questions about the Border War will not be left unanswered, even though it happened abroad.

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